

Senator Tom Harkin: Innovative Agriculture Policy Through Farm Conservation

“By putting \$22 billion into expanded conservation programs over a decade, the farm bill could become the most sweeping environmental legislation since the Clean Air Act of 1990.”

- New York Times, 2/14/02

For nearly 40 years, Tom Harkin has been an active member of the House or Senate Agriculture Committees, including 12 years as Chairman or Ranking Member. His tenure as Senate Chairman included the passage and implementation of two successful and groundbreaking farm bills in 2002 and 2008. **The Harkin-led farm bills successfully broadened the farm bill from a predominant focus on commodity programs to include initiatives promoting conservation, nutrition, emphasis on local and regional food systems and farm based and rural renewable energy and energy efficiency.** Harkin has also been a steadfast advocate for family farmers through the farm crisis of the 1980s and has advocated for a comprehensive food and farm policy, including effective farm income protection and commodity programs, as well as strong, progressive conservation assistance for agricultural producers, and rural economic development.

Perhaps his single greatest legacy in agriculture is the major expansion of conservation programs. For two decades leading up to his chairmanship, Harkin was a leading voice in calling for support and expansion of agricultural conservation. Upon taking over as chair, Harkin set out to strengthen the full range of USDA conservation programs and provide conservation compensation in response to needs and demands for assistance from farmers and ranchers across the nation. The result was **the 2002 farm bill, which contained an overall 80 percent increase in conservation funding across seven separate programs for a total of nearly \$40 billion in total investments.**

The Conservation Stewardship Program:



Harkin's signature accomplishment in agriculture is the creation of the **Conservation Security Program (CSP)**, the voluntary incentive program that allows farmers and ranchers to be compensated for adopting and maintaining good environmental and stewardship practices on land in production and which is designed to fundamentally change the focus of the conservation program from the retirement of a small amount of acreage to conservation of working lands. As a result of Harkin's leadership, working lands now receive more federal support than land retirement programs. **Renamed the Conservation Stewardship Program in 2008, the CSP program now has over 60 million acres across the nation enrolled, including over two million acres in Iowa, with a total**

federal investment of over \$3 billion dollars, including \$200 million in Iowa. An additional 10 million acres per year were authorized in the 2014 farm bill.

Environmental Quality Incentives:

In 1990, Harkin authored the **Agricultural Water Quality Incentives Program** to provide incentive and cost sharing payments for practices addressing water quality in agricultural production. This small program was a forerunner to the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) adopted in 1996**. Under Harkin's leadership, the program was increased by 450 percent, from \$2 billion to \$11 billion in the 2002 bill in order to address a broad range of environmental issues in crop and livestock production.



Other Key Conservation Investments:

In addition to conservation practices on working lands, Senator Harkin recognized the need to set lands aside in order to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. He sought to enact and invest in programs that assisted agricultural producers for their costs and forgone income, and which valued the environmental benefits associated with adopting and maintaining conservation practices. **In all, Harkin was responsible for a combined \$23 billion in new federal conservation investments in 2002 and 2008.**

Programs included:

- **The Grassland Reserve Program** - created by Harkin to fund protection and restoration of up to two million acres of private grassland, including prairies, on both working and non-agricultural lands.
- **The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – doubled the acreage cap and allowed for greater economic uses on CRP lands, including managed haying and grazing and biomass production. The farmable wetlands program has proven successful in protecting small wetlands in Iowa.
- **The Wetlands Reserve Program** – doubled acreage caps.
- **The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program** - increased by \$700 million to help Iowans and others create and restore wildlife habitat on their private lands.
- **The Farmland Protection Program** – incentivized keeping agricultural land devoted to farming purposes.

Supporting Organic Farming:

Harkin created a series of provisions in the rural development titles to fund organic research and to provide cost-share funds to help Iowans and others become certified under the organic certification program. **The National Organic Certification Cost Share program was increased from \$5 to \$22 million in 2008, reflecting growing demand for organic products.** Harkin also broadened eligibility so that farmers who grow or raise products organically or other methods using sustainable approaches are eligible for conservation related grants. Finally, Harkin continued and strengthened the **Farmer's Market Promotion Program** to continue the growing national interest in promoting fresh local foods.

To stay up-to-date on these and other issues, please visit <http://www.harkin.senate.gov/>, Senator Harkin's Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.